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Ethics Or Etiquette

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Recently in conversation with friends in a small intimate gathering, I mentioned outer-court names and passed on gossip. Later I was told that I had "violated etiquette." Had I?

Etiquette is socially accepted forms of behavior, agreed upon by the members of a community. Ethics involves morality, the nature of right as determined by a group or an individual. I believe there is a great deal of confusion of these terms in the "Pagan Community."

Going by fairly traditional rules there are the "Laws of Wicca." Among these there is a very firm one saying one should never reveal another person as a Witch without their permission. However a person who has revealed themselves publicly as a witch shouldn't complain. And is it a violation of ethics to tell of a person by their outer-court name? Only insiders could know the legal name of the person, so what is the danger?

Ethics can be fairly easily agreed upon in the general pagan community. Anything that puts someone else in an embarrassing or dangerous position is unethical. We all make mistakes at times, but we try to act in a manner consistent with our ethical code. Etiquette, on the other hand, is very deceiving. We assume, since we are all members of the "Neo-Pagan Community" that we have the same etiquette. But the only etiquette I have ever been explicitly told about involves greetings to be exchanged between members of a group and their high priestess or between two high priestess of different groups. What about a more common meeting?

Say a friend of mine is tired of being a solitary and wishes to come to a group celebration. What etiquette should I follow to bring this person to such a circle? I could either contact the group beforehand and ask permission, or tell them I will be bringing a guest, or I could simply bring a guest - with no warning at all. In the first situation, the responsibility and decision is theirs; in the second I am responsible for my guest's behavior; in the third I am a boor and will never be invited to their circles again.

No one has covered all the possible conflict situations in the Pagan Community. So there is no way I could agree to follow an "etiquette." My general code is simply to use common sense, and give the other person an easy out. For example, if you think someone else is a Witch and wish to find out, you might tell them that you are one. To receive trust you have to give it first.

A secondary problem in this situation is how does one keep a secret? Should one only speak in whispers, or when no one is within 100 paces? I think that looks furtive and produces suspicion in the mind of outsiders. Or do we follow Poe's lead and put the secret out in the open and disarm the opposition?

I know several people who studiously "maintain secrecy" but everyone knows that they are "witches." Worse, because of their secrecy, their colleagues don't know what a witch is except it must be nasty since they won't speak of it. I do not proclaim my religion, nor do I hide it, and I have never had any problems. I hear 3rd hand horror stories but would like to hear first hand experiences, good or bad. Please write me c/o Panegyria.

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